

December 4, 2009

MEDIA, PA – After supporting President Obama in his difficult but necessary decision to complete the indispensable mission of eliminating Al Qaeda's safe haven in Pakistan, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) wrote to the President asking him to provide further details on the mission's exit strategy. Congressman Sestak has consistently called for an exit strategy based on clear benchmarks of success and/or failure that will allow us to monitor the costs and benefits of our commitment and will trigger our exit if the mission is achieved or an alternative strategy if our goals are not being met.

"No one wants to put more of our servicemembers in harm's way, and no one wants to be spending more of our resources abroad when there is so much to be done at home. But President Obama has made the difficult decision to complete the indispensable mission of eliminating Al Qaeda's safe haven in Pakistan," said Congressman Sestak. "However, after eight years of war and pressing needs at home, I believe it is essential that we have in place a comprehensive exit strategy for all of our forces.

"I have consistently stated the requirement for benchmarks that measure success or failure because my national security experience has taught me that benchmarks will make our exit strategy more effective. We cannot afford to muddle along for any period of time. We have to aggressively pursue a focused mission, and if our goals aren't being met we have to assess the costs and benefits of an alternative, including an exit to a containment strategy."

Congressman Sestak has been consistent in his support for an exit strategy for our forces in Afghanistan. In June, he was an original co-sponsor of a bill (HR 2404) calling on the Secretary of Defense to outline an exit strategy for United States military forces in Afghanistan participating in Operation Enduring Freedom. He then voted for an identical language in an amendment to the FY 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, which failed in the House of Representatives.

The full text of the Congressman's letter is below.

Dear Mr. President,

Having served as Director for Defense Policy on President Clinton's National Security Council and having witnessed conditions on the ground in Afghanistan early in the conflict there as Director of the Navy's "Deep Blue" antiterrorism program, I understand the challenges involved in the difficult decision to commit additional troops to Afghanistan. I commend the diligence with which you conducted this critical review, and I support your conclusion that our mission in Afghanistan is indispensable to our national security.

As we go forward, I do hope our emphasis clearly remains, as you have suggested it must, on Pakistan and the elimination of the safe haven there from which Al Qaeda currently operates.

Your established timeframe to begin drawing down troops sends an important message -- to the American people, the Karzai government and other regional powers -- that our mission is urgent and not open-ended. You have also indicated your commitment to continually assessing our progress on the ground. However, after eight years of war and pressing needs at home, I believe it is essential that we have in place a comprehensive exit strategy for all of our forces.

My experience has taught me that the most effective exit strategies are based on clear benchmarks that will allow us to monitor the costs and benefits of our commitment and that will trigger our exit if the mission is achieved or an alternate strategy if our goals are not being met.

Mr. President, I do believe that with the proper mission of eliminating Al Qaeda in Pakistan, we can achieve our objectives, but it is essential that we have a viable exit strategy based on clear benchmarks.

I would, therefore, respectfully ask that you provide further information on the benchmarks that will govern our mission -- at the appropriate unclassified level -- so that the American people may be assured that our commitment is focused, effective, not open-ended, and has a clear end in sight. Thank you, Mr. President.

Warmly,

Joe Sestak  
Member of Congress

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, the Congressman was the first Director of Deep Blue, the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the Global War on Terrorism. He served as President Clintons Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Congressman Sestak is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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